California tuition increases likely under budget deal

lrosenhall@sacbee.com

Published Wednesday, Jun. 29, 2011

Students at California's public colleges and universities should brace for more tuition increases under the new state budget deal.

The 2011-12 plan cuts an additional $150 million each from the California State University and the University of California – for a total loss to each system of $650 million for the year – and creates the possibility of deeper cuts in December.

"Because cuts of this magnitude inevitably will drive up tuition for public university students and their families, we cannot stand silent," UC President Mark Yudof said in a statement Tuesday.

UC and CSU set fall 2011 undergraduate tuition in November, with UC raising it by 8 percent to $11,124 a year and CSU raising it by 10 percent to $4,884 a year. Students in both systems must also pay an additional roughly $1,000 a year in fees charged by individual campuses.

When Gov. Jerry Brown released his budget proposal in January, both university systems said they could take his proposed $500 million cut without raising tuition any further. But university officials have said for months that cuts beyond $500 million would result in higher tuition.

Now facing a cut of at least $650 million, CSU trustees will likely consider raising tuition again before the fall semester begins, said Robert Turnage, assistant vice chancellor for budget. He said the increase could be around 12 percent – on top of the 10 percent already approved last year.

"But I would emphasize that that's a ballpark, and the chancellor hasn't settled on exactly what to recommend," Turnage said.

The budget agreement between Democratic lawmakers and Gov. Jerry Brown has the potential to cut higher education even further in December, creating the possibility that tuition will rise in the middle of the school year at the state's community colleges. The reductions in the current deal represent 22 percent of UC's general fund budget and a 24 percent general fund cut for CSU.

The budget calls for "triggered" cuts if projected revenue doesn't materialize by mid-December. Colleges and universities will be the first in line to take those cuts under a tiered system Brown introduced Monday.
If the state gets $2 billion to $3 billion of the $4 billion in projected revenues, UC and CSU will each lose another $100 million, and fees at community colleges will go up by $10 a unit, or $300 a year for full-time students.

Community college fees are already set to rise this fall by $10 a unit – from the current rate of $26 a unit to $36. If the trigger cuts are implemented, fees for the spring would be $46 a unit – or 77 percent greater than they were in the semester that just ended.

Community college officials said the potential for midyear cuts could create havoc on campuses. If the state decides to raise fees after students have paid for the spring semester, college officials and students will face huge hassles, said Dan Troy, vice chancellor of the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office.

"It's a very messy situation," he said. "Very administratively difficult."

UC's student association blasted the Legislature for being unable to reach a budget deal that included tax increases.

"Instead of fair revenue measures, this budget falls heavily on students and their families and those who have already sacrificed enough during these difficult economic times," said Claudia Magana, a UC Santa Cruz student who heads the statewide student association.

Chris Chavez, president of CSU's student association, said Californians should remember this budget vote when they feel the pinch of rising tuition.

"When students are wondering why their fees are going up, when students are wondering why they have less services offered to them, it all relates back to the budget," Chavez said. "California needs to know that cuts have consequences. They sound good in sound bites but they have real effects on real people."

© Copyright The Sacramento Bee. All rights reserved.